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ABSTRACT

This document is an official statement made by George D. Fischer, a spokesman for the National Education Association and other concerned groups. The statement was made before the Select Committee on Education in response to a house bill on preschool education. Mr. Fischer begins by praising the bill, particularly its emphasis on the child-developing content of the programs. He asks, however, that the bill be altered to say that children other than the economically deprived should be encouraged to participate in the programs. He goes on to express pleasure at the provisions mentioned in the bill for involving parents in the programs, but asks that additional provisions be made for using high school students in a work-study situation. He suggests further (1) a specific section in the law with an adequate appropriation for the training of professional personnel, (2) an increase in federal aid for the construction of facilities, (3) the establishment of a federal building authority, (4) a provision prohibiting sectarian instruction, (5) a special section in the bill to authorize payments to school districts to establish after school programs for young school aged children whose mothers work, and (6) a provision in the bill to encourage employers to provide minimum-cost day care for the children of working mothers. (MH)

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Statement of
George D. Fischer, President
National Education Association
on HR 13520
"Comprehensive Preschool Education and
Child Day Care Act of 1969"
before the
Select Subcommittee on Education
February 27, 1970

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

The National Education Association has an intense and continuing concern for the education and welfare of all children and youth. As teachers we are well aware that this concern must embrace children of preschool age. Those fortunate children who enter first grade after having had experience in good nursery schools have indeed a head start over those who have been denied these opportunities. We know that children's potential for formal learning is greatly enhanced by early childhood educational experiences which help them develop their social consciousness, their awareness, and the constructive curiosity which is basic to learning.

We commend the chairman of the Subcommittee, Mr. Brademas, and his colleagues who have introduced legislation to provide Federal assistance to state and local agencies to encourage the expansion of early childhood development programs. We are particularly pleased that the thrust of the legislation under consideration is primarily aimed at development of the child, and only secondarily to the objective of releasing mothers to work or to take training that qualifies them for work.

We urge that it be made clear that it is the intent of the bill to prevent the programs developed under this legislation from becoming economically and socially segregated. It would be tragic if programs were developed which are open only to the poorest families. Small children could suffer irreparable damage if they are denied the opportunity to associate with a peer group which is racially, socially, and economically integrated. Achieving a cross section of society in each program will be difficult, but it must be the objective of the legislation. We suggest that the

PS 003075

language of the legislation be strengthened in this respect. There should be specific provision in the law that children other than those economically deprived shall be encouraged to enroll in the programs. The cost to the parent should be kept minimal as a means of encouraging such integration.

We note that the legislation provides for the involvement of parents in the child development program. We believe this is essential to the ultimate objective of improving opportunities for children. We also suggest that the legislation should provide for utilization of high school students in a work-study situation. This would be very beneficial to the children as well as the students, many of whom may later enter early childhood education as a lifetime career.

One of the major problems in expanding early childhood education opportunities is the shortage of qualified professional personnel. While under HR 13520 the Secretary of HEW is authorized to fund training programs, we believe there should be a specific section in the law, with an adequate specific appropriation for this purpose.

We also believe that funds must be made available for the construction of suitable facilities for child development centers. The provision that only 25% of the cost of such facilities may come from Federal funds is, we believe, unrealistic. We suggest the percentage be raised to at least 50%. We also suggest exploring the possibility of establishing a Federal building authority from which local communities could borrow at reduced interest, or perhaps a fund to subsidize interest payments to private lending agencies which lend money for the construction of child development facilities. There must be an attractive incentive to encourage local agencies to provide adequate, properly designed facilities if the objective of providing proper educational and day care programs is achieved.

We note that Section 14 provides for the establishment of an Office of Child Development within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. We believe this is a step in the right direction, providing that the Office be charged with responsibility

for programs relating to all children, not merely the disadvantaged, and that programs recently reassigned from the Children's Bureau to other agencies, such as Social Welfare Services, be reassembled in the office of Child Development. On the basis of our experience with governmental programs, we feel that it is essential that there should be one entity within HEW which has over-all direction and coordination of programs dealing with children--other than those education programs assigned to the U.S. Office of Education. It was necessary for Congress to create the Bureau for the Handicapped in the Office of Education for the convenience of the clients so that they could be better served even though the agency resisted, preferring to scatter the programs through other bureaus in the Office for purely administrative reasons. We feel the same principle obtains here.

We note that the usual disclaimer against Federal control is in the bill. We suggest that the provision prohibiting sectarian instruction also be included in order to avoid challenges as to the constitutionality of the legislation in the future.

We also suggest that there be a special section added to the bill to authorize payments to school districts to establish after-school programs for young school-aged children whose mothers work. There are thousands of youngsters in the country aged 6 and over who are roaming the streets between the time the formal school day closes and their mothers return from work. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to extend their working day to supervise these children. But the school facilities could be used if funds to employ personnel are available. These programs should be recreational in character and not merely an extension of the formal school day.

Provision in the bill should be made to encourage employers to provide day care opportunities at minimal cost for the children of working mothers. Other incentives for nonprofit-making and public agencies should be considered also.

We recognize that everything cannot be accomplished at once in the field of early childhood education. We do believe, however, that the legislation should provide realistic authorization with the hope that the necessary funds will be budgeted and appropriated. This country can make no better investment than in the youngest citizens, for in them is the hope of the future.

The following organizations have requested that we inform the Subcommittee that they associate themselves with our position as expressed in the formal testimony:

American Association of Elementary, Kindergarten, and Nursery Educators

Association of Classroom Teachers, NEA

Association for Supervision and Curricum Development

National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of Negro Women

PS 003075